

Gordon and Rene Miles

Gordon was born on 8th May 1924 at Watchfield where his family lived in a cottage in the High Street. His father worked on the land at Manor Farm and Gordon attended Shrivenham School until he was 14. The Watchfield children were taken to school by horse and cart and he clearly remembered the Headmaster, Mr Dance, as not a very nice person. He recalled the boys going to Woodwork lessons at the Bourton School – again being transported there every Tuesday morning by horse and cart.

Although ready to leave school at Easter 1938 for he had a job to go to, Mr Dance refused to release him until the end of the Summer term. Unknown to Gordon his father had arranged Indentures for him at the Swanhill Garage and signed him up as an apprentice engineer at a cost of £100. A quiet boy who knew his own mind, he had already agreed to work for Mr Yeats the butcher, starting immediately. He had to wait until July. It was the job of the butcher's boy to cycle down to Shrivenham railway station and bring back the whole carcasses of beef, pork or lamb on his bike.

Soon, he decided that he preferred to work at Wroughton aerodrome at the large paint factory where he was for 5 years learning every aspect of the trade. Like most boys, he enjoyed a motor bike and at 17 proudly progressed to his first car, a Morris 7. This was bought for a small fortune then for £67. He loved anything to do with cars; at this time early in the War there were not many cars on the roads. Most boys his age would have ridden either a motor bike or a push bike. He was often asked to give a lift to a friend or neighbour. With his driving skills he was now set very firmly on the road he has taken all his life – that of driving other people to their various destinations. He worked as a driver at Watchfield aerodrome and regularly drove an officer called Harry Drew, son of the Vicar of Wantage and who later became a long term resident of Shrivenham.

Gordon was soon in demand to take friends and neighbours to where the bus could not take them. He soon realised that he had a service to offer and "Miles Taxis" was born in the 1946 when he was 22. He moved to Shrivenham in 1948. Destinations included the Maternity hospital, weddings, and the popular Saturday night Dance with Harry Smith at the Memorial Hall meant that girls from the outlying villages would be taken back home safely. Gordon also had a contract with the Military College of Science which moved to Shrivenham in 1946. It was to ferry the waitresses to the College from their homes in the outlying villages and then return them home after their shift. He started work at 6am.

Gordon loved driving and as he said "tinkering around with cars". He later rented a large barn in Watchfield High Street to house his growing collection of vehicles. One of his driving commitments was a contract to drive the "bad boys" to Holyport Manor in Maidenhead and also to the Prince Rupert Home in Newbury each Sunday and to collect them on the following Friday to bring them back home. This had necessitated buying a mini-bus. In all the time he transported these boys he never had any trouble from any of the difficult children. And this was in the days before an escort was

mandatory. A quiet, genial man, his stature and commanding appearance, would no doubt have helped as his wife commented.

Another interesting time in Gordon's life was in the 1940s and 1950s when Mr Dike and son operated a carpentry and funeral business in Shrivenham. In those days many people passed away at home so when transport was required to take the coffins to the houses Gordon obliged with his car and a trailer. The Dikes had provided carpentry and their funeral services for many years previously. Gordon spoke of the wheeled handcart that much earlier had been used to transport the coffin from the house to the church.

In the early 1960s his wife Rene came into his life and together they maintained the very successful business of "Miles Taxis" for the next 40 years or so. The service Gordon and Rene were offering progressed considerably when they were awarded a contract in 1970 by the Fitzwaryn School in Wantage to collect, deliver and return the children from the area each day. They became even busier. Fitzwaryn was a special needs school and took children from its catchment area from 3 to 19 years of age who had varying degrees of learning difficulties. Gordon needed a coach to fulfil this contract and also an escort for the children for by this time an escort was compulsory. Rene was happy to be the escort as well as doing the paperwork for the business and thus "Miles Taxis and Coach Service" was born. One or two more drivers were taken on and life became very busy with the expansion of the bus and coach business. More contracts followed and Gordon was regularly taking children to Swindon, Newbury and Maidenhead. At one time Miles Coaches were transporting as many as 380 youngsters a day to and from schools in the region. In all, the firm operated a fleet of 9 coaches and 2 mini-buses, employing 10 full time and part time drivers plus school escorts. They also operated a private hire service in addition to the taxi service.

In 1985 Gordon and Rene decided to launch their popular day trips and holidays programme. Day trips to Salisbury, London and Carterton were among their many excursions whilst the door-to-door holiday service included such destinations as Edinburgh, the Isle of Wight, Holland, Austria, Blackpool and Jersey. It was at this time that Rene learned to her astonishment that some of the villagers and their families had spent their lives living inland and had never seen the sea. The favourite holiday was the Isle of Man.

RENE

Rene was a War time evacuee from the Docklands in London and assigned to a family at Fernham Manor with her little brother and sister in 1939. In the London bombing their family house was completely destroyed. Her parents fortunately survived and made the decision to move to rural Berkshire so as to be near their children. Rene's father worked at Watchfield aerodrome and her mother worked for Lord Faringdon at Buscot. After a while the whole family were re-united and rented a cottage at Eaton Weir. On leaving school in 1941 Rene worked as a housemaid at Buscot House during the time it was requisitioned for a girls' school evacuated from Bexhill. She walked to work across the fields each day from Eaton Weir to earn 7 shillings and 6 pence a week. Her marriage in 1944 was short lived but she had a daughter, Shirley,

who lives now in North Oxfordshire. She then went into service at Compton Regis House, living in for £4 a month. Later she worked for the Muirs on their farm caring for their 3 children and looking after the poultry. She recalled sharing the Land Army girls' special farm workers rations of extra cheese and bacon. This at a time in austerity England when food was severely rationed.

Rene moved to Shrivenham in 1952. Here she met Gordon Miles who had by this time been running a very successful taxi service for the village for several years. Rene proved to be an exceptional help in not only being the escort to the children being taken to the Fitzwaryn school and on the Faringdon route but also coping with the loads of paperwork. Following the closure of Eagle Motors in Faringdon, Miles Coaches took on more contracts necessitating Rene to give her full attention to the bookwork at home. Rene and Gordon married in 1969 and continued their successful business until they retired in 1998.

Interestingly enough, Rene's daughter Shirley became a Miles for she married Gordon's nephew and furthermore, also works in the coach business.

With retirement in view Gordon and Rene sold the business to Berry's Transport of Ashton Keynes who kept the name Miles Coaches but operated from Marshgate Swindon. The existing employees retained their jobs and Gordon and Rene paid tribute to them when they said how lucky they had been with their staff and over the 50 years the business had been running it had been greatly enjoyed and that they had made many friends. In addition the local community had been very supportive.